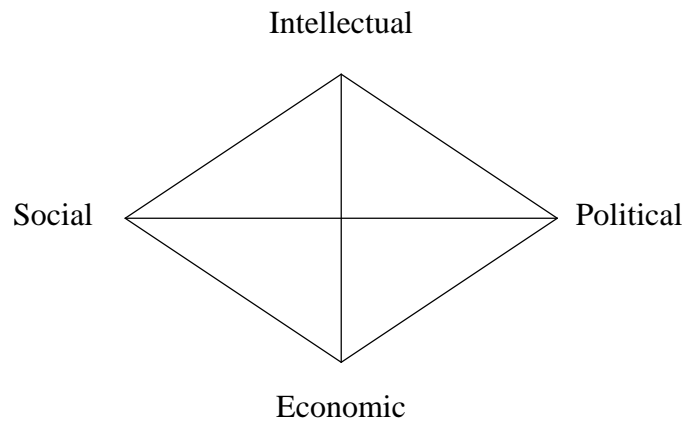


Historical Methods and Approaches: The Existential Historian

A. Confrontation with the Subject Matter

1. *Economic*—that is, having to do with the satisfaction of the material needs of people
2. *Intellectual*—that is, pertaining to the training and refinement of the mind, specifically in the areas of culture, interests, tastes, skills, arts, etc.
3. *Political*—that is, concerned with government, the state, or the running of a polity
4. *Social*—that is, having to do with human beings living together as a group in a situation in which their dealings with one another affect their common welfare



B. On Explanation (six basic types)

1. *teleological*—in terms of purpose
(the Black Death was sent to punish us for our sins);
2. *classification*—when an event has been shown to be of some class of events already familiar to us
(the Black Death was an outbreak of bubonic plague);
3. *generalization*—classed as an instance of some general law (science)
(when a contagion is introduced into a community, the rate of mortality will be directly proportional to the virulence of the contagion and inversely proportional to the level of resistance of the members of that community)
4. *description*—describing of the intermediate steps involved (read-write history)
(a ship from Kaffa traveled to Southern Italy in December 1347 and brought bubonic plague with it).
5. *referential*—some reference to a possible cause
(rats caused the Black Death of the 14th century).
6. *analytical*—the testimony we have from contemporaries describing the symptoms of the victims corresponds closely to the symptoms those with bubonic plague present (analytical history)

C. Formulation of Questions for Historical Study

1. *Badly-Formed Questions:*

“Why was bubonic plague able to kill so many people in Europe between 1348 and 1350?” [leading question: assumes that bubonic plague was the cause of death]

“What was the cause of the Black Death?”
[implies there was only one cause]

“Did rats bring about the Black Death?”
[implies a yes or no answer, when rats may have been a necessary but not sufficient cause]

Why were Europeans so stupid as to allow filth and garbage to act as a breeding ground for rats, and thus spread Black Death?
[biased point of view (anachronistic)]

What if the Black Death had never occurred?
[too abstract, not testable by reality-based criteria]

2. *Well-Formed Question:*

How well do the symptoms of the victims of the Black Death as described by contemporaries coincide with the disease we know as bubonic plague? [note that posing the question this way allows the possibility for a negative result—i.e., they do not coincide well]

D. Basic Relationships among the Historian, Evidence, and Whatever the Historian Claims It Is Evidence For

1. *Past-Based, Past-Oriented*—historian claims to study the past to find out what happened in the past
2. *Source-Based, Past-Oriented*—historian claims to study presently existing sources to find out what happened in the past
3. *Past-Based, Source-Oriented*—historian claims to study the past to explain why the presently existing sources are the way they are
4. *Source-Based, Source-Oriented*—historian claims to study the presently existing sources to provide possible explanations for why the sources are the way they are

Source-Based, Source-Oriented Theory

